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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000333

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR INR

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL BO

SUBJECT: Sitrep 6: Detainees Exceed 200

Ref: Minsk 331

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Number of Detained Continues to Grow Despite Release of Youth

¶11. (SBU) According to human rights NGO Vyasna, there are now 227 identified protesters who were arrested early this morning. Trials are already underway at many Minsk city courts. According to Vyasna, the sentences of those who have already stood trial range from 5-15 days in jail. Human rights NGO Charter97 reported that 45 underage detainees (under 18) were released from the Okrestina detention center on March 24. Independent press reported one detainee who suffered internal organ damage after being beaten during his arrest, escaped from the hospital where he was being treated.

Handing Out 10 Day Sentences Like Hotcakes

¶12. (SBU) In the afternoon on March 24, Poloff went to the Partizansky District Court where 29 detainees were standing trial. Poloff commented that the courtroom was set up like a conveyer belt, with trials lasting no longer than six minutes. While detainees were given a brief opportunity to present their cases, most did not have enough money to hire a lawyer. Poloff reported that the average sentence for the detainees was 10 days in prison. Deputy head of the human rights NGO Belarus Helsinki Committee Gary Pogonyailo reported that a judge in the BKGB's Okrestina detention center is also sentencing detainees. Pogonyailo noted the detained are not allowed to be represented by lawyers, nor are observers allowed to view the rapid court trials at Okrestina. [Note: Poloff was able to observe two trials at a different court. During one, the judge asked why "American [security] services" were in her court.]

More on Alleged U.S. Embassy Abduction of Demonstrator Sivchik

¶13. (SBU) On March 24, Emboff spoke with Galina Sivchik, the mother of Vyacheslav Sivchik, who the press reports was "abducted" in a U.S. Embassy vehicle late last night (reftel). After visiting her son in the hospital today, Galina informed Post that he was severely beaten last night. Vyacheslav told her that he received a phone call last night from someone claiming to be the Embassy's Protocol Assistant, who was requesting an appointment on behalf of Ambassador. Galina told Emboff that Vyacheslav agreed to leave the square to meet Ambassador. After demonstrators formed a human corridor for him to sneak out in order to avoid the police, he jumped in a car parked next to the square. [Note: It was not clear from the conversation with Galina whether Vyacheslav saw the car plates.] The car was actually

full of police. The vehicle took him to the Nemiga district of Minsk, where according to his mother, Vyacheslav was beaten before being taken to the Okrestina detention center.

Russian MFA: Tension in Belarus is OSCE's Fault

¶4. (U) On March 24, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov blamed the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for the tensions in Belarus following the March 19 presidential elections. Lavrov accused the OSCE of playing an "inflammatory role" by pre-determining the results of the elections in Belarus to be illegitimate and presenting biased election observation assessments.

Three Polish Citizens Detained, Including a Former Ambassador

¶5. (SBU) On March 24, independent press reported two Polish diplomats visited the Okrestina Street detention center to check on three Polish citizens who were detained. Among reported detainees is former Polish ambassador to Belarus. [Note: The former ambassador is a private citizen and carries a regular passport.] The former ambassador told his Embassy that police beat him, although he did not state when or where. When they left, the Polish diplomats did not make any statements and did not speak with journalists.

Georgian Journalists Detained in Minsk

¶6. (U) On March 24, independent media outlet Belapan reported that police detained Georgian journalists Nino Georgobiani and cameraman Georgy Lagidze while they were trying to interview family members outside of the Okrestina detention center. The journalists had official credentials but had failed to register their arrival in Belarus within three business days, as required by Belarusian law.

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